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courage is contagious

Viewing cable 10GUAYAQUIL13, GUAYAQUIL PROTESTS AGAINST CORREA REGIME

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Understanding cables

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tag **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#10GUAYAQUIL13**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
10GUAYAQUIL13	2010-02-12 20:01	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Consulate Guayaquil

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.eluniverso.com/2011/04/18/1/1355/cable-248733.html>

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGL #0013/01 0432001
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 122001Z FEB 10
FM AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0153
INFO RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUAYAQUIL 000013

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/12
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: GUAYAQUIL PROTESTS AGAINST CORREA REGIME

DERIVED FROM: DSCG 05-1 (B), (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. On February 11, several hundred thousand lin...

id: 248733
date: 2/12/2010 20:01

refid: 10GUAYAQUIL13
origin: Consulate Guayaquil
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination:
header:
VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGL #0013/01 0432001
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 122001Z FEB 10
FM AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0153
INFO RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

----- header ends -----

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUAYAQUIL 000013

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/12
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: GUAYAQUIL PROTESTS AGAINST CORREA REGIME

DERIVED FROM: DSCG 05-1 (B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On February 11, several hundred thousand lined Guayaquil's main avenue answering Mayor Jaime Nebot's call to protest the central government's treatment of the city. During a fifty-minute speech, Nebot attacked President Correa's policies that he claimed marginalized Guayaquil, and called on citizens to help him end the government's policies, not the government. Nebot also called on other cities to follow suit. The central government staged a series of initiatives, including free health clinics in poor neighborhoods, to stem support for the march, but media estimates place attendance at 200,000-350,000. The march ostensibly was called to protest the fact that the government's funding of Guayaquil was \$17 million less than authorized, but quickly became a referendum on the government's actions against Guayaquil. Some are already hailing the march as a possible turning point for opposition in the country, but the big question remains, what next? End Summary.

THE BUILD-UP

¶2. (U) Over the past month, Guayaquil Mayor Jaime Nebot has been involved in a highly publicized feud with finance minister Elsa Viteri over the fact that Guayaquil is budgeted to receive \$17 million less in its budget this year. Nebot alleges that on a per capita basis Guayaquil is receiving considerably less than any other provincial capital and Quito, despite having the country's largest population and highest share of tax revenue to the government. Viteri counters that the government used a fair and equitable formula to calculate the budget, but has yet to publicize exactly what the formula is. Nationally, support for the new budget is divided along party lines. Many small towns and centers of PAIS support are seeing increases in their budget and therefore support it. As a response, Mayor Nebot called for a march to protest the way the central government treats Guayaquil.

CHANGING THE THEME

¶3. (SBU) Although the march was initially called to express displeasure with the budget, the message coming out of Nebot's office in the past week was that the march was a rejection of the entire Correa government and its concept of 21st Century Socialism. This idea seems to have caught traction where the protest against the budget did not. In informal discussions, consulate members did not note much excitement over the upcoming protests. However, as the theme was expanded to include what Nebot framed as attacks against Guayaquil, such as the closing of a popular, municipally run health clinic program and a rejection of socialism, excitement over the march grew.

THE MARCH

14. (U) Media estimates of the size of the crowd vary from "tens of thousands" to over 350,000 people. One newspaper, Hoy, estimated the crowd at 200,000 based on photos from the event, but these photos did not take into account the significant crowds that overflowed on to side streets. Those who attended the event claim it was larger than the large protest two years ago against the new constitution, which was estimated at more than 300,000 people. ConGen Guayaquil can confirm that 10 city blocks were full of people standing shoulder to shoulder. At 1600 Nebot took to the stage alone. As is his custom, he gave a rousing, profanity laden and seemingly unscripted speech. He struck a careful balance between calling for the citizens to fight and explaining that he is not a "golpista" (seditionist). "No, we are not vulgar incendiaries or revolutionaries, but neither are we cowards." He added that Guayaquil will fight "till the end of the dictator, not the president." On numerous occasions he compared Correa to Hugo Chavez, which led to strong applause. "We don't want to be Caracas. If he (Correa) likes it, he should go to Caracas or stay in Cuba," referring to the fact that Correa left the day before the protest to have knee surgery in Cuba.

EXTENSIVE PREPARATION

15. (U) The city exerted an enormous effort to organize the march. Buses were provided free of charge from all parts of the city and the city's mass transit system, the MetroVia, was free for all protesters going to and from the march. Police were stationed throughout the city to direct busses downtown. Newspaper reports state that more than 3,000 community organizations were involved in sending people to the protest. Many employers gave their employees the afternoon off so they could go downtown as well. Lastly, the city used a media blitz of billboards, newspaper, TV and radio advertisements to drum up support for the march. The government countered with its own national media blitz, alleging that Nebot's budgetary assertions were merely a political ploy, and his main

intention was asserting special rights for Guayaquil over the rest of the country.

GOVERNMENT REACTION

16. (C) Unlike in previous protests, the Correa regime did not mount a counter-protest. They tried to frame the march as a political maneuver on the part of Nebot rather than genuine outrage on the part of the population. In an attempt to downplay the size of the march, Correa accused Nebot of giving people ten dollars or a sandwich to attend the protest. [Note: Those attending the march cited the perceived disrespect of Guayaquil in this comment as one of the prime motivating factors for participating in the march. End Note.] At the same time of the march, Guayas governor Roberto Cuero of Correa's Proud and Sovereign Fatherland (PAIS) Alliance was in poor parts of the city distributing low-energy light bulbs and overseeing the delivery of medical services and garbage clean up in what he claims are sectors not properly served by the Nebot administration. Although Cuero claims these programs were planned well before the protest and were not meant to be a response, they are widely perceived in the city to be the central government's attempt to keep people from attending the protest. [Note: Governors in Ecuador are appointed by the central government. End note.]

GOING NATIONAL

17. (C) In a meeting with the Consul General the day before the protest, Carlos Vera, the popular TV personality and outspoken critic of the Correa administration, told the CG that he urged the mayor to address his speech to a national audience rather than just Guayaquil and to appear on stage with opposition figures from around the country. According to Vera, Nebot declined to do so, saying that he is only fighting for Guayaquil and has no further interest in national politics. They agreed that Vera would lead opposition protests in other cities, beginning with his already scheduled march in Quito on February 18th. Although Nebot did appear onstage alone and addressed his speech to Guayaquil, he offered Vera one concession: in his speech he called on cities throughout the country to rise up and protest.

18. (C) COMMENT: If the march's sole aim was to regain the "lost" \$17 million, it will likely fail as the central government is unlikely to give in (the president of the National Assembly even stated he would censure the Finance Minister if she were to give Guayaquil more money than the law allowed). However, some in the opposition are hailing the march as a turning point and are hoping that marches planned in other cities will generate similar support. The next protest march, being organized by Carlos Vera, is slated for Quito February 18. It is unlikely that marches in other cities will get 10-15% of the population onto the streets, but if marches in other regions do draw significant turnout, it could mark the first time that popular protests started on the coast cross geographic boundaries into the highlands (which have consistently been more supportive of Correa). Given the president's falling popularity, opposition groups are hoping this could occur, but they lack a unified vision and a leader capable of rallying all the disparate elements of the opposition. END COMMENT.
Fernandez

=====CABLE ENDS=====